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COMMENTS ON A COMMENTARY

[Professor H. Logeman's studies in the text of *Peer Gynt*, carried on for several years, appeared during the summer under the title: *A Commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Norwegian text of Henrik Ibsen's Peer Gynt, its language, literary associations and folk-lore*. It is printed at The Hague; the publisher is Martinus Nijhoff. It is a book of 484 pages. The work is of the greatest importance and a real contribution to the study of Ibsen's difficult drama.]

The following notes deal with pp. 18-80 of the *Commentary* before us. The first 17 pages are not here dealt with since they are discussed in connection with a review of the book in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Jan. 1918.

For *slikt et nemme*, line 229, Archer's word 'headpiece' will do, but *nemme*, dialectal *næme*, is more abstract, about the same as 'aptness.' One says it of a child that is quick to apprehend, apt at learning. Of a grown-up one no longer uses it, hence not 'gift' or 'talent.'

The word *rukken* is made to rime, line 374, with *bukken*, line 377. This rime is in reality not so utterly to be condemned as Com.¹ would do, when he says: "it is bad enough as the latter word is pronounced *bokken*." For the benefit of the foreign reader it may be said that the *o* in the writing *bokken* is intended to be closed, very nearly the *u* in 'pulling.' It is first to be noted, that in dialectal pronunciation the *u* of *rukken* too (cp. *drukken*) would be pronounced a closed *o*, and Peer may perhaps be allowed to follow his local usage. In the next place it must be remembered, however, that, in reading, the *u* in *bukken* and in words of that class was not always, as now, pronounced with an open *u*, that is with a closed *o*, but with the pure *u*. As recently as the time of the writing of *Peer Gynt* this pronunciation was common, and many old people still pronounce so when they read, even though they always say *bokken* (that is *bûkken*) when they speak. Now, of course, this only makes the rime allowable as a written rime, to be read, and not as a rime spoken by Peer; consequently from the point of view of Peer's speaking the lines we should, perhaps, have to pronounce *rokken: bokken*.

¹ Com. = commentator, Com. = commentary.

When Peer has put his mother on the mill-roof he warns her: ikke spark og spænd med benene, . . . du kan dratte ned. This verb *dratte* is, to be sure, not popular Norwegian, but often employed in literature and *Riksmaal*. So there is in reality no reason why Ibsen should have avoided it as a Danicism and used the thoroughly Norwegian *dætte*. But there is a very excellent reason why he does use *dratte* and not *dætte*. The latter means simply 'fall' or 'drop'; it is semantically a simplex.² But *dratte* conveys the idea of suddenness in addition to that of descent or falling. Consequently Peer does not say to his mother: "take care, be quiet, or you might fall down," but he says: "take care, be quiet, or you might topple down,"—the humor of which is instantaneous. It is merely another instance of always the right word, no purism here. Ibsen had no patience with the hyperpuristic language 'strivers.' There were times, and many, when he needed these naturalized words, and if he needed them he would use them.

Com. evidently looks upon *signe* of line 437 (*Signe reisen Bless your passing*) as the infinitive, which is strange, corresponding, as the word does here, exactly to the English. No auxiliary is to be understood, but *signe* is the optative (full form, *Gud signe* etc., as 'God bless' etc.). The word is common enough in popular and colloquial usage in just such cases as are illustrated in Aasen's *Norsk Ordbog* (Forøget udgave, 1873, p. 649). A little farther down Com. mistakenly regards the change from the form *Engelland* to *Engeland* in lines 498 and 499 as a change from the old name-form of the romances to the modern one. So, too, Archer, when he says: "Engelland—Engeland corresponds to Norroway: Norway." But the modern Norwegian name for 'England' is *England*; the form *Engeland* is also the romantic form with its *-e*. Hence the change made was merely an orthographic one, and the "dim country of romance" is still there, not the modern prose form *England*.

The Com. frequently refers to Danish usage and Danish forms; there is in the notes entirely too much reference to Peer Gynt's departures from good Danish. An example in point is the note to l. 523, Peer's words: jeg er like sæl. Why not have explained

² Or, at any rate, usually a simplex.

here that this is a common Norwegian idiom meaning: 'I don't care, it's all one to me, or it doesn't matter to me,' etc? Instead however, *Com.* has the remark "this expression sounds strange in Danish ears, where *sæl*, 'happy,' 'pleased,' is obsolete and sounds Norwegian." One would think that Ibsen's chief regard was for Danish usage and that he wrote primarily for a Danish public. Of course Ibsen did no such thing. He wrote for a Norwegian public and used its Riksmåal. And particularly *Peer Gynt* is full of words and forms from the lower levels of speech, some of which had never been used before in literature. We may, perhaps, say that Peer speaks as Peer would in real life, except that his speech had been normalized according to Riksmåal forms. The point of view should not be the so-called Dano-Norwegian, a name which it would be well to have discarded, but should be the present living speech of Norway,—the Riksmåal and the local vernaculars.

Coming back to a matter of translation, I have always thought that Archer's 'galloping death' was peculiar and a rather unsatisfactory rendering of Peer's *piskende død* in line 535. Logeman deals somewhat at length with this in a note that is a distinct contribution; it is one of the many which reveals the extensive study that the writer has given to the drama and its language. Now words of this type, present participles in form, are not participial in function, nor is the case before us. They are in Norwegian usually strengthening adverbs, and *piskende død*, therefore, is somewhat unusual, for *død* must be taken as a noun. Some of these words in *-ende* are of course also adjectives; in fact those that are of participial origin are adjectives first before they become adverbs, though these are relatively few in number now, whereas as adverbs they form a distinct and in the dialects a rather extensive class. Here belongs also *piskende*, which I cannot imagine used as an adjective in any other combination than the one in *Peer Gynt*. *Piskende* seems always to be used with *død*, but its form is most often, perhaps, not participial, a fact that *Com.* sufficiently illustrates. The etymology that *Com.* offers is, I believe, correct; cp. *beiske daue*, common dialectal form. Probably the form with *-ende*, therefore, is relatively recent; and it is at any rate a more or less local form (local east Norwegian).

The error in Archer's translation is that it gives the word adjectival force, unless Archer intends 'galloping death' as a whole to be taken as a mere asseveration corresponding to *piskende død*, but the former has the participial adjective, galloping, and *piskende* is not a participle.³ The latter means 'Zounds,' 'the deuce' 'by Jove' or some such expression. Com. would render 'God's death, which is too strong, or the German *Tod und Teufel*, or *zum Henker*, as perhaps the nearest approach.

The many differences in punctuation as between the rough draft, the final copy, and later editions are illustrated in such a case as line 567. Such changes as come from Ibsen himself may of course have a special importance, and deserve to be taken account of by the reader. The line in question is in the *Com.*: Ikvæld? Er du fra sans og samling? But in the later editions we have here a period after *samling*; in this they agree with the original draft. But Logeman notes that *R*, Ibsen's Ms. in its final shape, has: Ikvæld? Er du fra sans og samling! Then what is the reason for the change to the period in the editions (so *Minde-utgave*, V, and *Samlede Værker*, V)? Least satisfactory is the punctuation with a question mark. Professor Storm calls this kind of exclamation a *spørgende udraab*, that is an 'interrogative exclamation.' Now the instance in question is primarily an exclamation, as any *spørgende udraab* is which requires no answer. If it requires an answer the *spørgende udraab* becomes primarily a question. Here the question: Ikvæld? is followed by an exclamation which might as well have been worded: *du er da rent fra sans og samling*.

Anent the comments on the somewhat unusual idiom in line 580: *saa skal du vel 'stikke paa kruset,' 'help one self,' 'partake of,'* I shall call attention to an occurrence of the expression in Tegnér's *Fritiofs saga*, canto II, stanza 2:

En sed den gamle hade:
han jämt i botten drack,
och intet ord han sade,
blott hornet in han stack.

³ The form must have arisen in the following way: *Guds beiske* (= *bittre*) *død*, which was pronounced *Guss peiske dø > peiske dø > peiskende dø*.

Such an instance illustrates the origin of the idiom itself. Cp., in Ibsen's *Vildanden*, Werle's: *Stik dog paa glassene, mine herrer*. For the development of the unusual meaning 'to help one self' of something, cp. the dialectal-colloquial use of *stikke*, 'put out,' 'thrust out,' and the English use of 'send' and 'fork out.'

From *Com.* 586 it would seem that the word *salmebog* is taken as Archer's translation, 'psalmbook.' A foot-note reads: the book meant, as Dr. Western tells me, is likely to be a hymnbook rather than a psalmbook, and this the word *salmebog* notwithstanding, which Dr. Western thinks is 'hardly correct.' But in Norwegian a *salme* is a 'hymn,' and a *salmebog* is a 'hymnbook'; and of course it was a hymnbook that Solveig carried. Are Dr. Western's words correctly quoted, or has something dropped out of the sentence? As to *konster* in line 622, this is neither older Danish *konst*, as *Com.* suggests (and Dr. Western is quoted as rather thinking so also), nor is it a Sveacism. It is merely the popular Norwegian *konst*, 'trick,' plur. *konster*, 'tricks' ('feat,' 'feats'). The word is especially common in the Telemarken dialect (Skien, Ibsen's birthplace, lies in southern Telemarken). The Telemarken form of the sentence in question—*Paa Londe* (= Lünde) *viste du a høslog* (or *haaslag*) *konstir du konde* (*o* in all three cases—*û*). Also in 675 an erroneous translation is not corrected in *Com.* on Peer's words to Ingrid: *vær ikke tvær*. *Tvær* means 'cross,' 'stubborn,' 'contrary'; the last fits exactly here (Archer has 'wayward'). It may be noted that *tvær* here rimes with *hver*, hence has a long vowel. It is in this case, therefore, not the Nw. dial. *tvær* (which is pronounced *tværr*), but either the Danish *tvær*, or the local east Norwegian *tvær* that Ibsen uses.

Ingrid's words to Peer: *nu var du styg*, line 701, may be taken as the translations quoted have done: Archer, "Now you were grim," and German and French in the same way. But with the *Com.* I am rather inclined to take it as the characteristic Norwegian use of the past *var* for the present *er*, used commonly in remarking on the weather of the day, the remark applying as well to the weather at the time of making the remark as during the part of the day that has passed, and also used in characterizing an act or a word as kind, mean, etc. Now when Peer threatens Solveig with certain things

that he could do and might do, if he would, in case she does not dance with him, we can imagine that he emphasizes it in part also by some expression or gesture. And so Solveig might say: "how ugly you were then." But that which calls forth her remark is rather his whole bearing, his threat and the fact of his threatening, his having been so 'ugly' as to threaten. What she says, therefore, is 'how unkind you can be,' 'how ugly you can be,' 'it is horrible of you to say such things,' or 'it is ugly of you to be that way.'

Regarding the smith's act of spitting in his hands, as he is preparing to 'fix' Peer, I do not believe, as does Com., that there is "more than meets the eye" in the act. It is merely the smith's usual way of going about a job, whether it is some other more than usually difficult one in the regular labor of the day, or the task before him:—and we can have no doubt that if he got after Peer, he was going to do a thorough job of it. So the wood-cutter, for the practical reason that the axe will stick better, so any other laborer when engaged in some hard work, and so the fighter when he goes into the bout. However, in the other cases cited the act is undoubtedly an instance of a survival.⁴

The word *yr*, line 762, (Ingrid: *tröstlös var jeg*. Peer: *Jeg var yr*) is by Com. classed as Swedish in form and meaning, in which view he also quotes Storm. Western, however, accepting the Swedish form of *yr*, considers it purely Norwegian in meaning, namely 'giddy, especially from drink,' and he compares with a later occurrence in the play, where *yr* rimes with *gjør*. Thus it appears the word is purely Norwegian, for it is to be noted that also in the latter Ibsen writes it with a *y*. The precise meaning in Ibsen's use of it is best seen from its use in the second instance. Aase says to Peer: *kære gutten min, du var jo drukken; da ved en ei selv hvad en gjør, og saa havde du redet paa bukken, det var rimeligt nok du var yr* (that is, therefore,

⁴In the comment on line 717 *Aase og jeg* to the reference at the end (*Publications of the Society for the Advancement of Sc. Study*, I), should have been added one to Vol. III, p. 302, where the use in question was discussed and illustrated by Logeman with examples from Holberg and elsewhere. The Com. should also have mentioned the discussion of this point by Olson and Mauritzson, following the reading of Logeman's paper at the meeting of the Society (see Vol. I as referred to above).

'not yourself, unaccountable for what you did, not in full control of your senses, dazed'). And in line 762, it is the same occasion that Peer speaks of when he says he was *yr*. In this meaning the word is used in dialects from all parts of Norway; and, as Dr. Western notes, it has the Norwegian pronunciation in one of Ibsen's uses. But Aasen, *Norsk Ordbok*, gives both *ør* and *yr* as Norwegian, and Ibsen writes *yr* even when the rime requires the pronunciation *ør*. Now it must be emphasized that the Norwegian dialectal pronunciation is in western Norway more often *yr* (with an open *y*) than it is *ør*; the latter is of course the form in eastern Norway. As regards Archer's 'frantic,' that will hardly do; possibly this was suggested by the Swedish word *yr*, which most often means 'giddy, wild', as in *Fänrik Stål*, stanza 6; *jag var så yr, jag var så ung*, 'I was giddy, I was young.'⁵

In regard to the weak form of the adjective used without the prepositive article it seems to me that *Com.* to 871 does not distinguish between two kinds of cases which should be kept apart. One of these kinds of cases has the sanction of well-nigh universal Norwegian usage, which in a measure at least goes back to Old Norse times. The other kind of cases is in the nature of a recent extension of the construction in question; I must assume that it is these that Western has had in mind when he characterizes the construction as having grown alarmingly of late; and I must assume also that Logeman too meant only these when he used the words "already become common." The legitimate use of the construction in question is represented by such cases as *ældste gutten*, *travle onnen*, *hele dagen*, *halve aaret*, etc. Surely these are regular, and we should have objected to the use of the prepositive article here rather than to its absence. The case is somewhat different with *glohede jernet*, and with such a superlative construction as *høieste vælven*, line 923, and *strideste elven*, in 924. *Com.* seems to assume that in these cases the construction *det glohede jern* has been replaced by *glohede jernet*, that is: that the 'correct' *det*+wk.adj.+noun has been replaced by the wk. adj.+def. noun; however, such is, of course, not at all the case. Rather the latter is the outgrowth of the def. art.+wk. adj.+def. noun, by the disappearance of the first article on the analogy of such older cases as *halve dagen*, *ældste gutten*, etc.

⁵ I. e., the second poem of Runeberg's *Fänrik Ståls Sägner*.

I have examined so far the first 80 pages of the *Commentary*, covering Act I and 10 pages of Act II. If many passages or words have been found which in the writer's opinion require a different explanation from that of the *Com.*, be it said that these form a relatively small proportion of the vast body of critical material, in the main excellent, which the author offers to readers of *Peer Gynt*. The majority of them are of the greatest value to the student, especially to him who must use translations; on every page almost there is something that is a real contribution. The latter is true especially on the literary side. Students of Ibsen will be grateful for this new aid; doubly grateful that it was not given up, but brought to completion now, in spite of the difficult circumstances under which it was written and printed in war-ridden Belgium.

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